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Letter from David Young to James B. Finley

David Young

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Feb. 4th 1845 (Wood County, Virginia)

My dear brother,

David Young

Under an impression that it is far more easy to find fault with a book than to make one, I have endeavored to be attentive and candid in reading Mr Shinn's "Essay on the Plan of Salvation". I have sought, with no little labor, to understand him; ^{but} either from that obscurity which appears to involve the work, or from my dulness of apprehension and want of intellectual perception, I have not always been successful.

Mr Shinn possesses some genius, but he appears not to think on a large scale. He frequently argues with ingenuity and force on some detached part of his subject; but he seems not to see the consequences of his positions and arguments, when taken in relation to the whole.

If any of the readers of this work should understand it, I think they will have the advantage of the author; for I seriously believe that he did not understand himself. As this is going very far in giving ^{my} opinion, it is necessary to render some reason for it. In doing this, I might appeal to many parts of the book. But this ^{is} not necessary. I shall only refer you to his philo-theological essay on the evidence of truth, (page 68) where he states four propositions as being self-evident.

"1st It is impossible for God to be deceived, or to deceive others."

"2^d The Scriptures of the Old and New Testa-

ments have a real and true meaning."

"3^d The revealed will of God consists in the doctrines which constitute the true meaning of Scripture, and not merely in the external letter, or any false construction of it."

"4th It is possible for the human mind, as it respects the essential doctrines of Christianity, to distinguish the true meaning of the Scriptures, from all false interpretations of them, when its faculties are rightly exercised under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

"These principles are self-evident; and to deny them, or any one of them, will be to assail the very pillars of revelation."

Now, dear Sir, you know, that not any one of these propositions is self-evident. They are so far from being so, that they depend for their truth on a chain of propositions going before them. Mr Shinn says (pages 16, 17) "We will consider the principles of intuitive certainty, that are self-evident. By their being self-evident, I mean that their evidence is contained in themselves, and the mind perceives it immediately independent of all external proof or argument."

Now, is it not strange indeed, that after having given this account of self-evident principles, he should state the propositions above cited?

And what renders this still more astonishing is, he seems to suspend the truth of Christianity on them as being self-evident. Did Mr Shinn, by doing this, intend to overthrow the truth of the Christian Religion? Nothing was

further from his mind. But certainly he did not understand himself.

If my recollection is correct, you asked my opinion respecting the object he had in view, the system he meant to support, and the tendency of the work.

With respect to the first, I think his chief design is to combat the errors of Calvinism, and to draw off some of his brethren a little farther from calvinistic ground. In doing this, if I mistake not, he has fallen into some errors himself.

As to system, it appears to me, that he has none. His mind does not seem to be of a systematic cast. He perceives truth when its rays are reduced to a focus; but when they are diffused through that expansion which system embraces, objects become indistinct to him.

In regard to the tendency of the work, I think it is calculated to lead the reader to undervalue the sufferings of Christ; to reduce his views of human depravity; and to retard his progress in christian holiness. Such a tendency, no doubt, was far from the wish of the author.

According to my view, the sufferings of Jesus Christ appear on the pages of Mr Shinn's Essay, without that magnitude, which in reality they possess. Do they not appear too much like the sufferings of a good man only? Is not the reader's mind frequently impressed with idea

while reading this book?

Perhaps I am mistaken. However, Mr Shinn labors hard to prove, that Jesus Christ did not suffer the whole penalty of the law. This, I conceive, is an error which greatly undervalues the sufferings of the Son of God.

He seems to be entangled with the following principle: If Jesus Christ suffered the whole penalty of the law, then all those for whom he suffered are unconditionally freed, in every respect, from the law forever. To free himself from the inference here drawn, he denies the premises from which it is deduced. With all "his almost magical power of metaphysical distinctions," he seems to be at a loss to make proper distinctions respecting the penalty of the law. He does not appear to distinguish between the whole penalty, and the proper penalty of the law of God.

If I understand these terms, the proper penalty means the thing, both in nature and extent, which the letter and intention of the law demanded. The whole penalty is something else, substituted in the place of the proper penalty, and equal in value to it.

When the thing paid is equal in value to the thing demanded in the penalty of the law, is not the whole penalty discharged? If a man by some infraction of

of his country have forfeited a thousand pounds to its government to be paid in gold and silver, and he, or his friend for him, offer landed property fully equal in value to the ^{penal} sum, and the government accept the offer and receive the property, is not the whole penalty as completely discharged as if the payment had been made in gold and silver? The proper penalty is not indeed ~~if~~ paid; for that demanded gold and silver. But the whole penalty is certainly paid; for all penal obligation is removed.

That Jesus Christ suffered the whole penalty of the law, may be deduced from Mr Shinn's own statements. He strongly insists (page 154) that punishment is inflicted under any just government, for no other ends than such as "secure the influence of the government, for the sake of the general welfare." Now, if no just government can inflict more punishment than what is necessary "to secure its own influence for the sake of the general welfare; then the penalty of the law of God could contain nothing more than what was necessary to effect this purpose. If the penalty of the law contained nothing more than what was necessary to secure the influence of the divine government; then Christ suffered, accord-

ing to Mr Skinn's own account, the whole penalty of the law. For he says, (page 155) "The death of Christ manifested God's abhorrence of sin, as well as his love to the sinner, and justified the heavenly government in the pardon of all penitents, as well as it would have been done, if all sinners in the universe had been forever damned." Indeed he acknowledges, that the merits and effects of the sufferings of Christ are more than equal to the penalty of the law. (page 209) Who could refuse such an acknowledgment? Who can limit the merits, or conceive the effects, of the sufferings endured by the Son of God? What created mind can grasp the magnitude of this subject? Yet Mr Skinn strongly contends that Christ did not suffer the whole penalty of the law of God!

If I mistake not, the principal argument by which he attempts to prove this, is, that sinners, on this ground, would have a right to come, not to a throne of mercy, but to a throne of justice to sue out their liberty in the name of their surety. (page 155). He pursues this argument into all its ramifications, and twists it into various forms, through a great

number of pages. If my apprehension be correct, the whole, or nearly the whole, of what he has offered on this subject, is included in it, considered in relation to God and his creatures, to rights and obligations, law and Gospel.

Let us examine the weight of this argument.

1. Jesus Christ suffered the whole of the penalty of the law, or he did not. If he did not suffer the whole penalty, he made an atonement by suffering part of the penalty, or he made it without suffering at all. The last alternative will not be admitted. Then according to Mr Skinn's opinion, it will follow, that Christ made ^{an} atonement by suffer only a part of the penalty of the law. This appears, indeed, to be his sentiment.

2. If Christ suffered only a part of the penalty, then, according to Mr Skinn's argument, he gave the sinner a right "to sue out his liberty at a throne of justice" in that proportion he ~~is~~ ^{is} the law and left him to expect the other proportional part his deliverance from the hand of mercy by pardon.

3. On this ^{ground}, it would appear, that part of the sins of the world are removed by justice without mercy, and the rest to be removed by mercy without satisfaction. I am not prepared to receive such an idea as this.

4. If God will pardon part of the sins of the world without satisfaction, why not the whole? For purpose then did Christ die?

5. If God demanded satisfaction for part of the sins of the world, why not for the whole? Was not Christ able to render satisfaction for the whole?

6. As Christ made an atonement by suffering, his atonement must be in proportion to his sufferings. If he suffered only a part of the penalty, then he made only a partial atonement. But who will admit this?

Mr Shinn acknowledges the depravity of human nature. But it remains a doubt, whether his depravity is any thing more, than physical disorder introduced into the body and mind of man by the fall of Adam. The body has become mortal; and the mind weak. Is not this all, in his view of the subject, that mankind suffer in consequence of original transgression?

It is a way the principles of which are corrupted, and the first organization of which is so imperfect as totally to obstruct the intellectual faculties, would be led, without any bias of moral corruption attached to the soul, to form passions and tem-

pers, not according to principles of moral rectitude, but according to circumstances. You and I, dear Sir, believe that there is in the nature of man, a different kind of depravity from this. We believe that mankind are by nature totally depraved in those moral powers. But can we find ^{such} a depravity on the pages of Mr Shinn?

It is true, he acknowledges that evil propensities exist in children. But he contends, that these propensities are nothing different from temptation. (page 320).

He likewise contends that the same propensities remain in the most sanctified Christian. Whatever that depravity is, which is constituted by these propensities, according to him, it must remain inseparable from us in our present mode of existence. It can only be removed by the operation of death. Is this depravity moral? Is it not purely physical?

There is, indeed, a difference, in Mr Shinn's view, between children and sanctified Christians; the former having

evil passions and tempers; the latter being saved from them by grace. But it seems that these passions and tempers are not to be considered as belonging by nature to children, but they are to be considered as the effects of ~~that~~ the energy of those evil propensities, putting forth itself in the actions of the first part of human life. Then it seems that the soul of the child is by nature equally free from moral pollution as the soul of the most sanctified Christian.

From evil passions and tempers perfect Christians are delivered; but from the cause from which these result they are not to be delivered, until they experience the powerfully sanctifying influence of death! Is this Methodism? Is it not involving Christian perfection in clouds and darkness?

Does not a great part of this book ~~darken~~ ^{darken} ~~conclude~~ ^{conclude} by words without knowledge?

Perhaps I have said more than enough. I shall therefore conclude, by observing that I attack nothing wrong to Mr Skinner's intention, but think that he did not understand himself.

D. Young

P. S. March 10th 1815. I congratulate you on the return of peace to our country. I hope now, that the Spirit and Life of Religion will also return. However, we may expect that the effects of the unhappy and wicked war which has just terminated will ^{be} long felt on morality and Religion.

Dyannings Skirmish of
Asa Skirmish book "On salvation"
by Bishop McTear

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Criticisms on "Skirmish on Salvation"
(A copy)

Dyannings